

Grant to draw tourists to prison  
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JOLIET — A parking lot next to the old Joliet prison could be converted to a tourist stop by this summer.

The Joliet Visitors Bureau has announced that the state awarded a nearly \$50,000 grant matched by the city for a total of just under \$100,000 for the job.

The plan is to add informational kiosks, landscaping and benches to create a parklike setting where tourists might stop to look at the old Joliet Correctional Center and shoot photographs.

## City matching funds

The city made a commitment in July to provide matching money for the grant. On

Monday, the city council authorized spending on the project and approved an agreement with the state that makes the project possible.

The plan makes use of one of Joliet's best-known landmarks, said Rebecca Lantka, marketing director for the visitors bureau.

"We get calls from out of the country, from Europe," said Lantka.

She noted that visitors to the Route 66 Welcome Center at the Joliet Area Historical Museum sometimes inquire about the old prison.

The Joliet Correctional Center closed in 2002. But city officials have been working with a developer interested in converting the old prison into a commercial site with a museum, stores and residences.

The prison still is the property of the state of Illinois.

## Embracing prison history

While city officials and civic leaders in the past have tried to avoid Joliet's history as a prison town, the limestone structure in recent years has been an inviting setting for television and movie productions.

The first season of the TV series "Prison Break" was filmed at the prison. The site also is used in the movie "Public Enemies," which stars Johnny Depp and is scheduled to be released this summer.

Two Joliet businesses, Artistic Signs & Neon and Duke's Landscape Services, will be involved in creating the tourist site, Lantka said.

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